

STATEMENT OF DANIEL N. WENK, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING S. 817, TO AMEND THE OMNIBUS PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT ACT OF 1996 TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL AUTHORIZATIONS FOR CERTAIN NATIONAL HERITAGE AREAS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

March 20, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 817, a bill to amend the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996 to provide additional authorizations for certain National Heritage Areas, and for other purposes.

S. 817 has four main provisions. First, the bill expands the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area by an additional county. Second, the bill makes several technical corrections to the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor including a name change for the area and the deauthorization of the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor Committee, whose duties have already been assumed by a non-profit management entity. Third, the bill names a new local coordinating entity for the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, it reauthorizes federal funding for the area for an additional five years, and gives the Secretary of the Interior several new authorities. Fourth, the bill increases the authorization ceiling for four existing national heritage areas by \$5 million each and requires the Secretary to conduct an evaluation of each area three years before the cessation of federal funding.

The Department has no objection to the first three main provisions of S. 817, with several recommended amendments described in this testimony. The Department is still considering its position with regard to the provisions in the bill that increase the authorization ceiling for four existing heritage areas and extend Federal funding for Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor . The Department will provide the Committee with its views on this issue by letter before the Committee's markup of this bill.

Less than a year ago, there were 27 heritage areas. Today, there are 37. Our understanding is that national heritage areas are locally driven grassroots efforts to preserve resources that were intended to operate independent of Federal funding at the end of the authorization period. While the National Park Service would continue to support the heritage areas through technical assistance, the heritage areas were to be largely self sufficient. This was the understanding, particularly for those heritage areas created in 1996 and the more recently designated heritage areas. We are disappointed that heritage areas that are nearing the end of their authorization period or that are approaching their authorization ceiling did not better plan for this eventuality. We appreciate that the sponsors of the bill recognize this concern by requiring the preparation of a report to examine what role federal funding should play in the future of these heritage areas.

Currently, there are 37 National Heritage Areas designated across 27 states with over 61 million people residing within one of these heritage areas. Responding to continued community and congressional interest in studying and designating new national heritage areas, the National Park System Advisory Board reviewed the program and prepared a report on the appropriate role of the National Park Service in supporting these areas. The Advisory Board's 2006 report,

Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas, recognized the important role of national heritage areas in expanding conservation stewardship and in identifying and preserving significant historic resources. The report also recognized that national heritage areas need a legislative foundation that establishes a clear process for designation, administration, and evaluation.

Among the Advisory Board's specific recommendations for program legislation was a provision to address the future of national heritage areas after an area reaches the end of its authorized funding level or time limits for funding. Before the publication of the Advisory Board report, most of the discussions on program legislation focused on the need to establish criteria for designating new areas and managing existing areas. The Advisory Board recognized that the National Park Service needed to take a more proactive approach by assisting national heritage areas in envisioning and planning for a sustainable future. For this reason, the report included a recommendation that the legislative foundation for the program require that "three years prior to cessation of federal funding authority, a study be conducted to recommend the appropriate level of future National Park Service involvement in the National Heritage Area including but not limited to future federal funding".

In July 2006, the Administration transmitted to Congress a legislative proposal for national heritage area program legislation that included many of the recommendations of the Advisory Board's report. This proposal, which was introduced in the 109th Congress as H.R. 6287, incorporated the requirement for a study three years before cessation of funding in a slightly different format stating that the areas should "conduct an evaluation and prepare a report on the

accomplishments, sustainability, and recommendations for the future...”. The National Heritage Area Partnership Act (S. 243) introduced by Senator Craig Thomas during the 109th Congress and passed by the Senate, and a similar version of the bill (S. 278) recently introduced during the 110th Congress, also contain similar language. The Administration is currently working on a similar proposal for heritage area program legislation to be transmitted to Congress.

S. 817 provides additional funding authorization for the Essex National Heritage Area, the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor, the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Corridor, and the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor, four areas that have almost reached their authorized \$10,000,000 funding limit. Although the bill would not provide the areas with an extension of time beyond their sunset date of 2012 for financial assistance, it would authorize an additional \$5 million per area. This extension of federal funding would allow for the continued operation and management of these national heritage areas, while providing the Secretary the necessary time to undertake an evaluation to assess the progress of the area in achieving its legislative purpose.

These four national heritage areas have a commendable track record of partnership and project accomplishments and have shown signs of becoming self-sufficient. The Essex National Heritage Area commemorates 400 years of seafaring history and tradition and has enabled the Salem Maritime National Historic Site, a National Park Service unit that is only 9 acres in size, to play a far more prominent role in the region by harnessing the energy of volunteers in interpretation and fundraising.

The Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor preserves 110 miles of towpath canal, historic communities, and what has been described as a “biological mosaic of forest, marshes, streams, and lakes.” Cuyahoga National Park, which encompasses 22 miles of the corridor, has taken advantage of the heritage area as a framework for large-scale regional collaboration to build partnerships and conserve a range of resources.

The Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area celebrates the region’s industrial legacy through its rich folklife traditions, opening doors to the past with driving tours, audio CDs, a local radio series, exhibits, and publications. This area celebrates a portrait of people working in one of the most important industries at the turn of the century, which helped form the economy of this country and continues to preserve this regional culture for the next generation.

The South Carolina National Heritage Corridor helps rural communities thrive by promoting their place-based resources. For example, a new Heritage Corridor Farmers Association supports the agricultural heritage of the area by sponsoring regular promotions, tours and preservation initiatives.

The proposed evaluation process would document these and other accomplishments and would give the areas the opportunity to develop a long-term plan for reducing or eliminating the future financial role of the National Park Service.

S. 817 has several other provisions. It would provide for a new local management entity for the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, replacing the existing Federal commission that

has served as the local coordinating entity with a nonprofit corporation, the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, Incorporated. It also authorizes the new corporation to receive an additional five years of financial assistance. This recommendation comes in part from a 2006 National Park Service technical assistance study entitled *Connecting Stories, Landscapes and People: Exploring the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Partnership*, which analyzed the strengths and challenges of the heritage area including critical ingredients for sustained success in the corridor. It identified options for the future including alternatives for a new management entity, the involvement of state, county and municipal governments, and the involvement of the National Park Service.

The Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor has a strong record of accomplishments including the development of the 165-mile D&L Trail that forms the spine of the corridor, the innovative Corridor Market Towns program, the Two Rivers Landing project, which is a model of sustainable economic development, and the award-winning Lehigh Gap Wildlife Refuge reclamation project. We believe that the legislative language for the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor should be amended to parallel that of the other four areas reauthorized in S. 817. We also believe that the area should build on the existing study to develop recommendations on the role the National Park Service should play in the future including the reduction and elimination of federal funding.

The Department has no objection to the other provisions in the bill relating to a name change for the Ohio and Erie National Heritage Corridor and the deauthorization of the Ohio & Erie Canal

National Heritage Corridor Committee, the addition of a county to the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, and other technical corrections to existing national heritage areas laws.

The Department would welcome the opportunity to work with the committee to make some technical corrections to section 4 of the bill relating to the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor. In addition, the Department would like to work with the committee on amending this bill to include a new section to make some conforming amendments to the National Coal Heritage Area that were inadvertently left out last Congress when S. 203 was enacted.

In conclusion, the Department notes the critical need for program legislation to establish a framework for the designation of national heritage areas and a process to evaluate the success of heritage areas in carrying out their approved management plan while also planning for their future as they approach the limits of their funding authorizations.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony and I am prepared to answer any questions that you or other members of the committee might have at this time.